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ABSTRACT

In order to determine whether the reading habits and attitudes of parents influenced the reading performance of their children, a 36-item questionnaire was sent to 213 parents of children in the STARR (Students Are Reading Right) reading program in grades one through six at two elementary schools in Neenah, Wisconsin. Responses on 148 questionnaires were analyzed after having been divided into two groups: parents of good readers (those gaining at least 1.5 grade levels in total reading during the 1975-1976 school year) and parents of poor readers (those gaining less than 1.5 grade levels during the same period). Results showed that parents of good readers are themselves good readers and present good reading models; they are aware of the importance of a wide variety of background experiences; they read for pleasure, use television selectively, and encourage creativity; and they read to their children before the children entered school. Parents of poor readers tend to view reading mainly as a skills process; they read pragmatic materials and use the public library infrequently. (JM)

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NEENAH JOINT SCHOOL DISTRICT

NEENAH, WISCONSIN 54956

Title III ESEA
STARR Project

November 1976

Margarete Dix, Director

Are Reading Habits of Parents Related to Reading Performance of Their Children?

A survey of parents about their reading habits and attitudes showed some noteworthy trends underscoring the importance of the influence of the home on the reading of their children.

In the fall of 1976 a questionnaire for parents of children grades 1-6 was sent out to investigate reading habits and attitudes of parents and to determine their possible influence on reading performance of their children. The survey attempted to answer a number of questions about the relationship of home environment as it influences learning and performance levels of reading.

Bruno Bettelheim and other researchers have estimated that at least one-half of all that is learned has been assimilated by the age of four.[1] It seems therefore logical to select reading habits and attitudes of parents and the home environment for a study of their relationship to children's reading performance.

One hundred forty-eight questionnaires of parents of elementary school children, grades 1-6, were analyzed and responses compared between the two major groups: parents of good readers and parents of poor readers. The criteria for defining a "good" reader was determined by a gain in total reading of 1.5 grade levels or more during the 1975-76 school year which was the project's objective. The standardized test instrument used in this survey to determine criteria for definition of "good" and "poor" readers was the Gates MacGinitie Reading Test, vocabulary and comprehension sub-tests, which yield a total reading score. This reading test was administred as a pretest in the fall and as a posttest in the spring.

Questionnaire Development and Survey Procedures. The subject of this survey consisted of all parents of STARR (Students Are Reading Right)Reading Project students, grades 1-6, who had participated in the program during the 1975-76 school year and who were in the program in the fall of 1976. Any student who has

[1] Vern Jensen, "A Model for Extending Career Concepts," The Vocational Guidance Quarterly 21 (December 1972): 115-9.

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a lag of more than one year between ability and performance is a candidtate for STARR. Wilson and Coolidge Elementary Schools located in Neenah, Wis., were selected because STARR, an examplary Title III E.S.E.A. project funded for three years, was operating at these schools.

The group of parents at both schools was homogeneous; there were no controls on economic and social status. Sex differences of parents and children were a factor in evaluating responses.

The survey instrument was a questionnaire asking about reading habits and attitudes of parents, general home environment, activities of the family, ranking of school subjects according to their importance, and values held by the parents. The original questionnaire was revised several times after each examination by Dr. Jean Caudle, Dr. Charles Wilson, or several graduate classes in reading all from the University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh. The final form included 36 items and was sent home to 213 parents in September of 1976. Responses were divided into two groups parents of "good" readers and parents of "poor" readers.

Each group of responses was then sub-divided as follows:

Responding	Good Readers No.	%	Poor Readers No.	%
Total	98	100	50	100
Mothers answering for their male child	46	47	22	44
Mothers answering for their female child	18	18	11	22
Fathers answering for their male child	0	0	0	0
Fathers answering for their female child	0	0	0	0
Mothers and fathers answering for their male child	25	26	12	24
Mothers and fathers answering for their female child	9	9	5	10

n= 148

There was little difference in the percentages of the various response categories. Therefore, this survey was not influenced by the sex of the parent or that of the children.

Of the 213 questionnaires sent out, 184 or 86 percent were returned indicating much interest on the part of the parents. Of the 29 questionnaires not returned, 62 percent were those from parents of "good" readers while parents of "poor" readers had a non-return rate of 38 percent. The lower return rate of parents of "good" readers may point toward waning interest once expected performance has been achieved followed by a general feeling of complacency.

Thirty-six of the returned questionnaires were not used in the final analysis as no pretest performance base could be established; first graders could not be categorized as "good" or "poor" readers

as they were non-readers in the fall, while other students were either new to the program or new to the school and therefore did not fit the definitions of the criteria for categorization.

A difference of 10 percent or more was arbitrarily selected as a trend. Since the questionnaires were not used in an evaluative way or for instructional purposes, it was assumed that answers would be completed reliably by the parents.

Findings. Some definite trends emerged. They were: Parents of "good" readers indicated these habits and attitudes in comparison with parents of "poor" readers --

1.	Read to child before he entered school	10% more
2.	Had a wide variety of reading materials available to the child at his reading level	10% more
3.	Spent a considerable amount of time reading (at least one hour/day)	14% more
4.	Considered themselves avid readers	16% more
5.	Assigned a high priority to reading in the home	10% more
6.	Allowed children to read in bed	12% more
7.	Have an encyclopedia set in the house	13% more
8.	Give books or subscriptions as presents	12% more
9.	Have belonged to or belong to a book discussion club	10% more
10.	Subscribe to two or more newspapers	13% more
11.	Would rather read hard-cover books than paper backs	10% more
12.	Take an extended vacation during the year	13% more
13.	Tended to like novels	22% more
14.	Tended to like biographies	10% more
15.	Valued social adjustment	14% more

Parents of "poor" readers indicated these habits and attitudes in comparison with parents of "good" readers --

1.	Encouraged participation in organized sports	10% more
2.	Used the public library infrequently	17% more
3.	Are tolerant of differences	11% more

4. Like to try something new 17% more

5. Tended to like books on homemaking, arts and crafts, and technical publications 18% more

Furthermore, parents of "good" readers tend to use TV viewing selectively with time out during each evening when the set is not on; encourage the creative aspect more; consider reading success as important as being good in a competitive sport, tended to read Mother Goose Rhymes to their pre-school children more than parents of "poor" readers.

In assigning levels of importance to values, parents of "good" as well as parents of "poor" readers felt the same about:

1. independence
2. personal growth
3. getting things done
4. self respect
5. friendship
6. discipline
7. conformity
8. accepting things as they are
9. competition
10. leadership
11. recreation and play

Both groups also felt the same about:

1. The level of importance of reading in school
2. Continuing to read to their children
3. Setting aside time for family reading and discussion
4. Out-of-door play and general sports activities (100 percent of both groups answered positively
5. A quiet special reading place in the home
6. Special places for children's books
7. Best to answer only if you think you are right
8. Sharing reading or articles of interest
9. Telling or reading fairy tales to small children

Definitions of reading by parents of "good" readers were more global, such as: "Reading is the best source for learning;" "Reading is enjoyment, relaxation, and knowledge;" "Reading is conversation with the author;" "Reading is an adventure of the mind;" and "Reading is different worlds and lives that we could share in."

Parents of "poor" readers defined reading in a narrower sense focusing on word attack skills. Sample responses were: "Reading is decoding printed symbols into meaning;" Reading is the ability to understand what words are trying to tell us;" "Reading is a sentence or a group of words with subject and predicate;" "Reading is learning to sound out words."

Conclusion. This survey of parents has shown that those who are good readers themselves and present a good reading model are more likely to have children who are good readers. Children in a home atmosphere more inducive to reading will read more. Parents of "good" readers are aware of the importance of a wide variety of background experiences which tend to encourage more reading and which tends to result in a higher level of reading performance. In addition, they view reading in a broader concept and use reading for enjoyment, continued education, expansion of the mind, new in-

sights, change in attitudes, and for fun. Moreover, these parents read more newspapers, but the number of magazines was the same for both groups. However, parents of "good" readers tend to assume a more conservative stance and place a high value on social acceptance.

Parents of "poor" readers showed a greater rate of return of questionnaires and also answered more of the open-ended questions. Perhaps they recognize a greater need for the improvement in reading of their children and are more willing to participate in activities which will help their children reach higher reading competence. These parents tend to see reading mainly as a skills process, a definition of words, sound-symbol relationship, and rules of grammar. Secondly, they tend to read more pragmatic materials while parents of "good" readers read more for pleasure and enjoyment. Finally, parents of "poor" readers also used the library less frequently than did parents of "good" readers.

In conclusion, this survey has demonstrated that reading habits and attitudes of parents can indeed influence reading performance of their children.

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